

11.4

Command terms in IB psychology and assessment objectives

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In the IB psychology course there are three levels of assessment objectives.

- Level 1: Knowledge and comprehension
- Level 2: Application and analysis
- Level 3: Synthesis and evaluation

The command terms indicate the level of study, i.e. in how much depth you should study a particular learning outcome.

The rules are:

- A learning outcome at level 1 and 2 will only be assessed with command terms at these levels. All command terms at level 1 and 2 can be used interchangeably. Level 3 command terms cannot be used in exam questions.
- A learning outcome at level 3 can be assessed at level 3 as well as level 1 and 2. All command terms at level 1, 2, and 3 can be used interchangeably. This means that a level 3 question in the guide can be changed into a level 2 question in an SAQ in paper 1 section A.

In SAQs there can only be level 1 and level 2 questions. In essays there can be level 3 questions.

Command terms level 1: Knowledge and comprehension

Command term	Explanation in the guide	What it means	Example
Define	Give the precise meaning of a word, concept, or phrase.	Say what it means in psychology and use the right concepts to do that.	Define attachment.
Describe	Give a detailed account.	Give a reason for, or a narrative of, something.	Describe the role of situational factors in explaining behaviour.
Outline	Give a brief account or summary of something.	Give a brief summary of whatever is mentioned in the question.	Outline one principle that defines the biological level of analysis.
State	Give a specific name or other brief answer without explanation.	Give a very brief answer but don't explain anything.	State the role of communication in maintaining relationships.

Command terms level 2: Application and analysis

Command term	Explanation	What it means	Example
Analyse	Break down in order to bring out the essential elements.	Analyse means to consider existing evidence in relation to a specific problem; investigate possible explanations of a psychological problem.	Analyse why relationships may change or end.
Apply	Use a theory or an idea in a given problem or issue.	Describe how a theory would explain a given psychological phenomenon.	Apply a relevant theory to explain burnout in sport.
Distinguish	Make clear the differences between two or more ideas or concepts.	Indicate differences between two concepts or theories.	Distinguish between altruism and prosocial behaviour.
Explain	Give a detailed account including reasons and causes.	Give reasons and causes for a psychological phenomenon.	Explain factors related to the development of addictive behaviour.

Command terms level 3: Synthesis and evaluation

Command term	Explanation	What it means	Example
Compare	Give an account of the similarities between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.	Focus only on similarities and refer to these throughout the response.	Compare two theories of cognitive development.
Compare and contrast	Give an account of similarities and differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.	Focus on both similarities and differences and refer to these throughout the response.	Compare and contrast two theories of cognitive development.
Contrast	Give an account of the differences between two (or more) items or situations, referring to both (all) of them throughout.	Focus only on differences and refer to these throughout the response.	Contrast two theories explaining altruism in humans.
Discuss	Offer a considered and balanced review that includes a range of arguments, factors, or hypotheses. Conclusions should be presented clearly and supported by appropriate evidence.	Address the question in a balanced way (not biased) where you consider available evidence and choose the most appropriate evidence to support your argument.	Discuss factors related to overeating and the development of obesity.
Evaluate	Make an appraisal by weighing up the strengths and limitations of something.	Assess the value of something (e.g. a theory or study) by looking into the evidence.	Evaluate one sociocultural explanation of violence.
Examine	Consider an argument or concept in a way that uncovers the assumptions and interrelationships of the issue.	Carefully scrutinize an argument (or theory, concept, explanation) to see how it explains something and perhaps why. An examination could also include finding similarities and differences.	Examine models of health promotion.
To what extent	Consider the merits or otherwise of an argument or concept. Conclusions should be presented clearly and supported with appropriate evidence and sound argument.	Assess the value of a theory or concept in explaining a psychological phenomenon (e.g. depression). The conclusion must be clear and supported by relevant evidence (i.e. empirical studies and evaluation of the theory) throughout the argument.	To what extent do biological, cognitive and sociocultural factors influence abnormal behaviour?

Argument mapping: Is television violence harmful to children?

